

Jewels in a wilderness crown

Sea Lion Point lodge is setting of stellar art collection

BY KIM PEMBERTON
VANCOUVER SUN

A wilderness lodge in a remote location like Sonora Island, in Desolation Sound, is the last place you would expect to find a major art collection. But at Sea Lion Point, art is an intrinsic part of this unique West Coast architecture owned by B.C. billionaire Brandt Louie.

Sea Lion Point boasts the works of a dozen B.C. artists — a native carver, painters, sculptors, glass artists and porcelain artists to name a few. Upon entering the lodge, sited carefully in the woods in order to preserve as many trees as possible, a visitor notices that all of the art, inside and out, links this home to its lush, natural environment.

Sonora Island, just 10 kilometres long, has got to be one of the most magical settings in the world, says Wynne Powell. He is Louie's spokesman and also president of Sonora Resort, London Air Services Ltd. and London Drugs, all companies owned by Louie.

"In my job I have the privilege of being able to do projects like this," Powell said of Sea Lion Point, a 10,000-square-foot, four-bedroom lodge, so named because of the sea life nearby.

A love of fishing and fond memories of visiting an old fishing lodge on Sonora Island with his father was what spurred Louie to return there and create a luxury getaway for himself and others.

After renovating the original lodge, six years ago, where rooms rent for \$600 to \$875 per night from May 15 to Oct. 30 to fellow fishing enthusiasts, Louie decided to create another lodge — Sea Lion Point — from the ground up.

While Louie visits regularly and keeps an office there when he's not using the home, this four-bedroom retreat is available to rent for \$6,400 per night.

Louie declined to be interviewed but Powell explains that buying on Sonora Island was an emotional investment.

Powell says it was a labour of love for the 64-year-old businessman, who heads the \$4-billion H.Y. Louie Co. founded by his grandfather.

Louie, who owns a fleet of private aircraft, has the resources to go anywhere in the world in his free time. But the place he visits most often is Sonora Island, where he fished as a young man with his father at an old fishing lodge.

"This [Sea Lion Point] being a brand-new building, we had the ability to do a high-end statement piece. The art alone would not make the statement, but when



Glass wall by artist Markian Olynyk is one of many featured pieces at Brandt Louie's Sea Lion Point lodge.

it is combined with nature and the architecture I believe we achieved that," Powell said.

The architect was Tony Kloepfer of Scientific Architecture Inc., and the interior designer was Celine Pitre of Celine Interiors Inc. It was under Pitre's direction that all of the artwork was commissioned.

"Right away, I had a vision to make this home something special, something exceptional and different than a Whistler look, which I think is so overdone and boring," Pitre said.

"We suggested racking it up a notch and doing a sophisticated lodge, bring in natural materials and have a connection to the outside."

The main floor, with its nine-metre

ceiling and large expanse of glass, helps achieve that goal, but for the designer it was also imperative the home convey a sense of warmth. Besides rich fabrics and comfortable furnishings, the artwork is what most works to create the relaxed mood and connection to the outdoors.

Pitre says her most important decision early on in the project was making art part of the design and not an afterthought, which is often the case on projects. Luckily, Louie agreed, dedicating an estimated 10 per cent of the budget to art.

Flipping through her original design plans, Pitre can point to art installations in the home that were conceived before construction had even begun. In the drawings of the living room, for instance, over the fireplace there is a triptych painting, which was later commissioned from painter Robert Florian. There is a vertical artwork above the piano created later by painter Jan Corkan and a kelp-inspired mobile by artist Markian Olynyk. All are artists who worked in the past with Pitre.

Olynyk, a Vancouver-based artist, had already done a similar mobile which Pitre had seen at the University of B.C.

"She took what I had already done and expanded on it," Olynyk said. "Celine has a pretty focused idea on what she wants."

Olynyk, who also created a sea-lion sculpture in the entrance hall, a glass wall leading to the dining room and a series of glass sculptures in all four bedrooms, adds that he appreciated the designer's input to create art that blended into the home's spectacular setting.

"It's unusual. The space was conceived as a gallery to present the work. Art is really everywhere as opposed to the final touch," Olynyk said.

Florian noted that Pitre had seen a sketch he had done on three small canvases and she wanted something similar, but large scale and vertical. The triptych he created is of a Sitka spruce that commands centre stage above the fireplace.

"I feel very lucky to be part of it [contributing art to Sea Lion Point]. It's such a beautiful place to go and looking at the other art everyone has done a fantastic job," said Florian, who also painted a piece called *Tidal Tangle* showcased in the main hallway.

Corkan contributed an oil-on-wood panel that is interpretive of the local vegetation on Sonora Island. This particular painting shows the designer's theme of the four seasons.

"The painting starts out in winter with snow that melts into deep greens with the berries growing in the spring and buds, then summer with large blossoms, fiddleheads and ferns, then fades into the fall with leaves hanging above," Corkan said.

Every bedroom, as well as the main living room, has a series of three totem poles — called "story" poles by North Vancouver carver Philip Gray. In total, Gray carved 18 poles that are contemporary in



The sitting room in the Dancing Urchin suite at Sea Lion Point lodge.



The Sea Lion Point wilderness lodge.



Ancient Cedars painting by Robert Florian at Sea Lion Point.

style and more abstract than traditional totems.

Every room on the main floor has three poles grouped together. One of the poles is a fully carved, inside the home, while the other two are partially carved and stand directly outside the window where the first pole is erected. For instance, the pole in the Dancing Urchin bedroom or the summer suite is of fern leaves, while the partially carved pole outside is a stylized sea urchin and the third pole has been roughly chiselled.

Gray says he found the project a bit difficult because it wasn't something he was accustomed to doing. But at the same time he enjoyed the experience.

"It was fun in a way because it's a lot more free-form. You don't have to worry about having symmetrical designs and keeping to certain guidelines for traditional art," he said.

Pitre said she really enjoyed working with Gray and the other artists. "For me, this was a dream project. We knew what we wanted it to look like right at the beginning. The amazing part is walking through the home and seeing how it has all been achieved," she added.

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